FEMALE VICTIMIZATION IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BUCHI EMECHETA

SYNOPSIS

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Introduction

Few human emotions can rival the painful helplessness of lacking control over one's life and enduring the trials of powerlessness – the true nature of victimization. This concept is deeply embedded in Buchi Emecheta's novels where women suffer under the weight of patriarchy, racism, and cultural tradition. A victim is one who endures extreme suffering due to an outside force that he/she cannot control. Emecheta's powerful writing depicts women who persistently seek liberation despite the crushing weight of their victimization. By creating characters that strive to survive despite their challenging circumstances, Emecheta highlights how women can embody the essence of triumph while enduring the trials of victimhood. However what is more typical of her writing is that the adherence to and fulfillment of socially prescribed gender roles, decidedly leads to the victimization of African women. The novels demonstrate how women are victimized and abused by men, and how African communities suffer when exposed to corruptive aspects of European culture. The dominant theme prevailing in Emecheta's novels is abuse - emotional, physical, and figurative. Together these novels convey the depth of Emecheta's own victimization as an Igbo woman, and her sense of powerlessness in determining her own fate.

No discussion of African women's writing can be complete without Emecheta, for she is one of the best-known women writers in Africa today, sharing that position with others such as Ama Ata Aidoo , Mariama Ba , Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga and the pioneering Flora Nwapa. Ironically, Emecheta has not fully accepted the feminist label. The definition and use of

the term feminism poses a number of problems for African women writers and many of them tend to deny any affiliation to the feminist movement, even though their writings espouse feminist aspirations. Their detachment perhaps grows from the misconceptions that surround the concept of feminism which is often interpreted as being anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion in its theoretical framework. It therefore becomes challenging for a woman writer who shares none of these ideologies to take a feminist stance. She has to accept feminism with all its implications (some of which might be opposed to her cultural beliefs), or reject it completely, or appropriate the concept and redefine it in a manner that appropriately expresses her cultural experience. For Emecheta it is feminism with a small 'f', as she sees things through an African woman's eyes. Her comments not only suggest an attempt to renegotiate feminism, but also underscore the resistance of many African women writers to that label.

This study involves conducting a literary analysis of Emecheta's novels taking into account the African-centered tradition of maintaining African cultural values as crucial to analyzing the novels. This research ultimately seeks to portray how Emecheta's most intimate experiences as an Igbo woman have shaped her perceptions of her culture, as revealed through the novels themselves.

A brief review of the work already done in the field

Bibliography Enclosed

Objectives

The research would attempt to critically engage the many hues of Emecheta's novels. The study intends to look at the themes of female victimization, motherhood, enslavement, both by tradition and man, of the African woman and that of emancipation and the African woman's future. It strives to build upon fresh ideas that aid in interpreting African phenomena. The ultimate goal of this research is to dig deep into the purpose, authenticity, and effectiveness of Emecheta's fictional work, as that reflects the challenges and triumphs of life for African women in Africa and abroad.

Noteworthy contribution in the field of proposed work

Bibliography Enclosed

Proposed methodology during the tenure of research work

The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed., 2009) will be carefully followed.

Expected outcome of the proposed work

The expected outcome of the proposed work is to offer a comprehensive enquiry into Emecheta's fiction, and to bring to light the significance of her work in relation to African women and also to show the development of the writer through it. The guiding principle of this research rests on a conviction that Emecheta's fiction deserves a fuller treatment as she is a socially committed writer whose accounts of the position of women in African (especially Igbo) society differ markedly from those of her male counterpart (no less than Chinua Achebe, Elechi

Amadi etc). Emecheta's novels not only challenge the authority of male authors but also the depiction of African women in literature.

The rationale adopted is founded on the study of her nine novels- *In the Ditch (1972), Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Gwendolen* (1989) and *Kehinde* (1994). Emecheta's literary production is very big as she has written long fiction, juvenile fiction, short nonfiction, an autobiography, and radio and television plays. But in a study of this manner it becomes necessary for one to be selective. She is best known for her novels about Nigerian Igbo women, whether living in Nigeria or England. The criterion for choice rests on my desire to offer a particular perspective on Emecheta's works. Thus, while aware of the arbitrariness of any selective process, I have endeavored in my choice of novels to achieve a fair representation of the scope of her fictional production.

Bibliography in standard format

Enclosed

List of published papers of the candidate

Chapter Division for the Proposed Research Work

Chapter I: In Their Own Voices: The Female Heritage and African Women Writers

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Bibliography

Chapter I

In Their Own Voices: The Female Heritage and African Women Writers

This chapter makes a strong and compelling statement about the position of women and women writers in contemporary Africa using the words of the writers themselves. In many parts of Africa, women have long held primary roles as storytellers, teachers, poets, and oral historians. Yet only since the 1980s has African women's writing garnered significant national and international attention. Although many African women writers are just beginning to come into their own, but they are faced with scores of obstacles along the way. As African women struggle to claim their rightful place in African society and in the world, women writers, chart the course of this struggle in a rich variety of artistic works. Through prose, poetry, drama, sculpture, painting, music, and many other forms, African women speak their thoughts and share their perceptions about their lives and their societies.

Within the very recent tradition of written literature from black Africa, writing by African women has been very much in the margin that is only just beginning to move out of the margins itself. Since Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature in1986 interest in African literature has grown noticeably. African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Ferdinand Oyono are well known. Novels such as Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, are a few of the novels that might be described as literatures from Africa to reckon with.

The study of African literature has long been the preserve of male writers, and despite the enviable position women have occupied as oral artists African women writers were not given the

attention they deserved; even after the advent of the feminist movement, the male voice continued to be the dominant one. The impact of this masculinist literary tradition on African women writers can hardly be ignored. One of the consequences of this situation was that, thematically and stylistically, African women writers, predominantly those of the first generation showed close association with their male counterparts. African women writers have had to endure kinds of exclusions and contempt from a male-oriented African literary scene.

If Flora Nwapa as an icon then Emecheta is the most renowned Nigerian woman writer globally. By the time Nwapa's *Efuru*, the first ever novel written by an African woman, was published in 1966, a uniquely male literary tradition was very much in place in Africa. Yet Nwapa has been a role model for many others. Since her, African women have written a wide array of works that have been well received by scholars of African literature. A few of these include Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Mariama Ba, Miriam Tlali, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nafissatou Dialo, Aminata Sow Fall, Zulu Sofola, Fatima Dike, Rebeka Njau and Micere Mugo.

It is important to analyze African women's writing which uncovers the ways in which different writers have approached appropriated and subverted issues of female creativity, stereotypes of African Woman and colonial history. Confronting entrenched social inequality and inadequate access to resources, women across Africa are working with determination and imagination to improve their material conditions and to blaze a clear path for their daughters and granddaughters. African women writers move beyond the linked dichotomies of victim/oppressor and victim/heroine to present their experiences of resistance in full complexity:

they are at the forward edge of the tide of women's empowerment that, at the start of the twenty-first century, is moving across the African continent.

The writers examined are African women writing in English, rather than in their mother tongues. Of interest is the extent which they integrate cultural memories that may be similar to different from their own, by writing in a second language. To understand why and how African women write what they write, one has to examine the specific location in which they are situated. Since any specific positionality is restricted by gender realities and cultural boundaries, one needs first to revisit the issue of marginality to reexamine the site where women are silenced and where they break their silence. So the question arises, can one speak from the site of silence? What kind of speech can come out of it? Marginal writings have often presented the periphery as the opposite of the center, as a gigantic unit that serves as the "other" of the center. This merging and separating strategy enables both difference and similarity-difference between the center and the margin but similar at each end of the scale. However, the tendency to see the margin as a unified position, as the "opposite" pole in an absolute twofold paradigm, prevents one from seeing the margin as a wide expanse of physical, intellectual, and psychological space with its own dynamics, contradictions, and tensions. In actuality, the so-called margin is an immense heterogeneous space punctuated by boundaries and edges which define the limits of many different pockets of realities. The notion of the margin as one end of a twofold paradigm thus makes its extraordinary complexity very obscure. When attention is focused on the inconsistent relationship between the margin and the center, two issues often go unnoticed- first, the fact that the center created the very concept of marginality during a history of transformative interactions

between itself and the periphery and second, that the margin has its own quantum which function independently of the center.

African women writers are nevertheless sustained by a fear of sitting on the edge. The cultural fixation coupled with the alienated colonized is further complicated and intensified by the sexual politics of their environment. These women writers have the weighted charge of speaking out against the injustices women endure in male-centered patriarchal societies – a move that often results in the noticeable exclusion of their work within the academy and in literary circles. African women novelists themselves have been at the forefront in speaking out about the neglect they endure as artists. The importance of the African women writer is not limited to their role as preservers of cultural traditions, but also manifests in their ability to promote social justice in the lives of women in their respective communities. This chapter celebrates the efforts of African women writers in illuminating the factors shaping women's lives.

Chapter II

Writing in the Margins to Create Home: The Inimitable Buchi Emecheta

Love, abuse, tradition, triumph and failure exist as common themes in the lives of women despite differences in race, culture, religion and status. However the manners in these issues are expressed in women's daily lives varies significantly. This chapter strives to identify and analyze the factors impacting the lives of women expressed in the novels of Buchi Emecheta. It will explore how Emecheta defines Nigerian women as those who struggle or thrive as members of Igbo society-both inside as well as outside. This study will also attempt to identify and clarify the underlying political messages inherent in her body of literature, highlighting how Emecheta's work reflects or departs from certain aspects of Igbo culture. However, her work also criticizes the racism of European societies, the cultural superiority of white feminists who wish to aid African women in embracing liberation the dismal consequences of imperialism in Nigeria; thus the novels transcend mainstream Western feminist ideology. In engaging Emecheta's work this research attempts an African-centered critique of the literature and does not embrace Emecheta's as a definite reflection of feminism or any other theoretical perspective. Emecheta's depiction of Igbo culture and its impact on women is wholly molded by her personal triumphs and sufferings, yet her intention lies in highlighting common struggles facing Igbo women.

Within this chapter a survey is done to demonstrate that the works of fiction under study have been greatly influenced by the author's own personal life experiences. Her texts expose very personal expressions of Igbo culture that offer conflicting views regarding the nature of traditional African values. The worldwide propagation of Emecheta's work makes her

representation of Africa all the more powerful and at times it may be the only in-depth experience of African life one will know.

Emecheta has published a great many novels from *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second Class Citizen* (1975), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *The Rape of Shavi* (1985), *A Kind of Marriage* (1987), *Gwendolen* (1989), also known as *The Family*(1990), *Kehinde* (1994) to *The New Tribe* (2000). She has also two novellas to her credit- *Naira Power* and *A Kind of Marriage.* She also has to her literary credit an autobiography, *Head above Water* (1986), four children's books: *Titch the Cat* (1978), *The Moonlight Bride* (1983), *The Wrestling Match* (1983), and *Nowhere to Play* (1980).

She peoples her stories with female characters stripped from the idealization that one is bound to find for instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where the female figures play supporting roles to the male characters. Therefore, her novels offer an interesting view of the social and cultural victimization experienced by women in their Nigerian homeland as well as in the foreign territory of England.

Emecheta's creative writing may be considered double-voiced in a number of respects. For instance, from a feminist perspective, the novelist is regarded as an heir to a patriarchal tradition, yet she challenges phallocentric discourse by addressing the predicament of women; from a postcolonial viewpoint, Emecheta's work is said to be influenced by both African and European aesthetic conventions and ideologies.

For the most part, profoundly cynical, her novels take one from the early twentieth century through to contemporary Nigeria while stressing the woman's point of view. Although presented as literary texts, they are solidly grounded in investigating the social aspects of womanhood and motherhood with an emphasis on discovering why the position of women in African society has deteriorated. Despite the many challenges impacting her life, Emecheta has produced a diverse body of literature. The themes of her texts range from issues of identity, sexuality, education, motherhood, marriage, rape and incest, religion, poverty, and tradition.

This chapter strives to decipher how Emecheta reflects the inner nature of Igbo culture as influential in the lives of women who uphold traditional values or reject them all together. Indeed, Emecheta is one of the most remarkable writers Nigeria can boast of. Her contributions to the annals of writing in Nigeria will never be forgotten.

Chapter III

Translating Life into Literature

(*In The Ditch and Second- Class Citizen*)

The present chapter aims to discuss how Emecheta challenges the patriarchal and colonialist representations of African woman, and becomes a role model for the transformation of African society in her two first novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen* which are autobiographical fiction respectively. Together they were published as *Adah's Story* in 1983. This chapter is devoted to the study of the two novels in relation to autobiography, self definition, and displacement. Using her real life experience she crafts great fiction. In *In the Ditch*, a young Nigerian woman, Adah, struggles hard to overcome her faith of being financially dependent on the British institutions and become a liberated woman through her hard work and education. *Second-Class Citizen* also elaborates on the difficulties of the migrants, positioned within the two cultures, like Emecheta's protagonist Adah Obi herself. The only way to Adah's liberation is her industrious endeavour to become a famous writer.

Emecheta's persona1 experience no doubt provides much of the material for these works, for Emecheta was abandoned by her husband while living in Britain; she raised five children on her own within the slums of London. Adah struggles as a single mother of five, and manages to retain her dignity and sense of self through her education. She obtains a degree in sociology (as did Emecheta), and while working started to write.

Because of the autobiographical nature of these first two novels, Emecheta presumably examines her own remembered cultural past and works through her difficulties in the story of Adah. The novels are painfully honest examinations of the problems confronting the Nigerian immigrant woman. Adah appears to be the author's spokesperson, for at times Adah's opinions and Emecheta's seem to merge. Through Adah, Emecheta is able to write her own story, one in which she is no longer marginalized but clearly in the centre.

Ostensibly, Adah is portrayed as a survivor who manages to escape the ditch through striving to become better educated. Her musings selectively relate many Igbo customs that endorse the second class status afforded to women, and she becomes increasingly negative as her Igbo culture places her at a disadvantageous position in her foreign environment and in relation to her husband. One learns of the Igbo preference for male children, the reluctance to educate girls, and the bride price required with marriage. The narrator scathingly records the accepted double standards for men and women as regards marital fidelity. Adah inherits the belief that it was *her* duty to work, not her husband's, that Men do no wrong, it is always the women- they have to beg forgiveness, because they are bought, paid for and must remain like that, silent, obedient slaves. Adah negative comments mark the beginnings of a theme recurrent in Emecheta's later works: the analogy of slavery and marriage.

Emecheta creates some distance from her personal experience by using a third-person narrative voice and by creating a separate persona in Adah, as the central character. Both works have been highly attacked for their frank criticism of Igbo customs relating to women.

Chapter IV

The Shallow Grave

(*The Bride Price, The Slave Girl and The Joys Of Motherhood*)

After completing her first two novels Emecheta decided to extend her own story backward by writing an African saga beginning in the Nigeria of her mother's formative years. The three novels *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *The Joys of Motherhood* examined here are comments on the status of women under patriarchal domestic rule and on the negative facets of traditional Nigerian society. This chapter also addresses the question of audience and attitudes towards traditional culture, and explores double-voiced discourse.

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta takes up a theme treated by many Igbo writers. It is the story of the outcast who is rejected by the family of a loved one. Although it is the man who is an outcast, it is the woman who, defying her relatives and marrying her lover, suffers a tragic end: Akunna dies giving birth to her child. *The Bride Price* is the first of three successive novels set in the Nigeria of the past where all three focus on the experiences of female characters within a male-dominated society. The second novel of the series, *The Slave Girl*, deals with a young girl's virtual slavery, and the third, *The Joys of Motherhood*, presents the questionable joys that the heroine, Nnu Ego, experiences in two marriages, the first of which produces no children.

This Chapter deals with Emecheta representations of Igbo society in its traditional form, and also during the period of colonial power. The chapter will look at the relationship between women and men within these systems of power as represented by Emecheta's novels. These

works are set in traditional villages where the influences of western ideologies have started to undermine women's power within the community. The patriarchal institutions which contain restrictive traditional practices clash with European values leaving potentially strong female characters without a voice.

Chapter V

Towards Consciousness Rising

(*Destination Biafra and Double Yoke*)

In *Destination Biafra* and *Double Yoke*, Emecheta goes beyond protest to show woman rising above her limitations productively, mapping out survival strategies and achieving independence and fulfillment outside marriage.

Destination Biafra constitutes another stage in Emecheta writing-here a woman is at the centre of political events. The Biafran novel has been something of a rite of passage for Nigerian writers and though Emecheta, while not having experienced the Civil War first-hand, was old enough to remember it and her *Destination Biafra* imagines an alternative and more conventionally heroic role for women in it. By choosing to focus on civil war, Emecheta seeks to deconstruct the masculinist assumptions that are inherent in the unquestioned notion of a "fratricidal" conflict in which women and children constitute no more than collateral damage. Emecheta carves out a new role for women in the destiny and survival of a nation. By creating a self assertive politically-informed heroine like Debbie Ogedengbe, Emecheta has successfully taken woman from the periphery of Nigerian politics and made her an active agent of history. The novel portrays the various roles women adopt during the war — traders, prostitutes, war time companions, wives and mothers. They are the greatest victims of patriarchal prejudices, victims of discrimination and ostracism. However, they react in diverse ways to counteract the adversities created by the war, and emerge as not only die-hard fighters but perhaps the greatest survivors.

In *Double Yoke* Emecheta once again campaigns against female subjugation and champions her case for female emancipation. The text highlights the issues facing Nigerian college students at an African university. In keeping with Emecheta's premise on female oppression, the novel relates the disillusioning experiences of a female college student, Nko, the main character, in the novel, whose personal relationships and educational goals are compromised by sexual politics on a Nigerian campus. The title refers to Nko's double bind as she realizes her equally degrading choice between prostitution as a traditional wife or as a liberated academic woman. Nko is also perplexed about the definite role the educated female should play in Nigerian society.

While Ete Kamba basks in the praise of his community as he pursues a college education, Nko must navigate a male dominated environment as a woman who is considered a sexual commodity. This novel examines the dissolution of traditional gender roles through Nko and Ete Kamba's romantic relationship. It ends with both the characters exploring issues of identity, while a pregnant Nko bravely decides to positively confront the consequences of choices previously made. It can be said that the novel returns to Nigeria in the late 20th century to take up again Emecheta's interrogation of the terms of women's struggles in the local and global webs of the African diaspora, viewed from a fictional reconstruction of the paths of travel from and to a minority region in Nigeria. The chapter instigates and elaborates upon a debate on gender quality in order to reach the main ideological function of the *Double Yoke*.

Chapter VI

Gender Voices and Choices

(*Gwendolen and Kehinde*)

This chapter examines the extent to which Emecheta is writing back in *Gwendolen*, focusing on the problematic of home and homecoming, *Kehinde* follows the self-development of the female protagonist in the very different contexts of African beliefs about reincarnation and European beliefs about abortion. *Gwendolen* is about the gender discrimination where as *Kehinde* focus the place of women in African Society.

Gwendolyn chronicles the difficult life of the title character, a young Jamaican immigrant who endures rape, incest, and racism on the way to independence. Gwendolen is cruelly made to move from her cradle stage into womanhood at a tender age of seven. The shy girl, wages a silent rebellion at the mother's departure. At the age of 16, her world of innocence is snatched away. Her uncle Johnny, who helped her to come out of mother's womb stands as a villain playing with the life of Gwendolyn. Paralyzed by fear and embarrassment, the child grows with emotional fatigue. The major theme in *Gwendolen* is the seduction of a daughter by fathers (biological and surrogate). Again in opposition to the conservative attitude of African people, Emecheta does not sweep the dust under the carpet. Emecheta not only condemns the sexual abuse of children, but she also contends that it is not uncommon in the African world, but rather is quite pervasive.

Kehinde tells the story of a woman torn between being true to herself and loyal to her husband and family. The protagonist, with the support of her women friends, leaves a polygamous marriage to create her own life. Emecheta returns once again to the problems of ethnic and gender identity in the context of contemporary Britain. One theme of the novel which is found in many of Emecheta's works is the struggle of women for self-realization in both traditional and modern settings. Emecheta recreates a family situation that recalls the experience of Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*. *Kehinde* involves a middle-aged Nigerian woman who relinquishes a professional career in England to return to her native land with her husband. When Kehinde arrives in Nigeria after staying behind to sell their house, she discovers that her husband has taken a second wife, reducing her to insignificance despite her status as an educated woman and senior wife. Kehinde eventually leaves her polygamous marriage, returning to England where she gains new perspective on her life. In fact her home, like Emecheta's own, is now London.

Chapter VII

Victimization vs. Victory

African women writers' development from novel to novel is sometimes impressive, as one can see in the case of Emecheta's steady growth from autobiographical works to novels proper.

The novels under examination are grouped by virtue of their common thematic or formal characteristics. This structure, allows for a clear overview of the recurring features of the novelist's fiction on the one hand and of the evolution of her standpoint on the other. Thus, the semi- autobiographical *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen,* which depict the hardships of an African woman in London, are understood in terms of their heroine's quest for self-definition; *The Bride Price,* The *Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood* are construed as comments on the status of women under patriarchal domestic rule and on the negative facets of traditional Nigerian society. *Destination Biafra* also set in Nigeria presents Emecheta's exploration of female subjection, with emphasis on war-torn postcolonial Nigeria. In keeping with Emecheta's theme of female oppression, *Double Yoke* describes the tragic limitations of Nigerian women in pursuit of academic excellence and the anxiety of assimilation. *Gwendolen,* unlike Emecheta's early work, seems to testify to her growing sympathy for black cultures. Not a very complex novel, but gratifying nevertheless. Finally, *Kehinde* is Emecheta's sharp coming of wisdom story of a Nigerian woman living in London, then returning to Nigeria, who gradually discovers herself. While critical of patriarchal tribal culture, Emecheta's novels demonstrate an

unwavering veneration for African heritage that reflects the divided loyalties of Africans torn between the competing claims of tradition and modernization.

Emecheta effectively writes herself into her works, defining herself as African woman writing from Britain and eventually marking her position as black writer. As a Nigerian writer and Igbo woman Emecheta creates novels that positively embrace Igbo cultural values. Texts reveal how women are strengthened through an adherence to traditional values affirm the culture. More importantly they also demonstrate how women who are subjugated by traditional norms reject the culture. Arguably the nature of this occurrence is dependent on the degree to which Emecheta regards traditional values as helpful or harmful in the lives of women. This idea is directly derived from the triumphs or failures of her life experiences and reflects the degree to which Emecheta herself has been able to successfully subscribe to dominant cultural values.

The value of Emecheta's novels rests on her ability to realistically recreate novels that highlight the hardships impacting women in Africa, particularly Nigeria. Her novels draw attention to the various ways that women struggled to assert themselves against racism, sexism, and poverty- at times they fail; at times the succeed. The complexity of the themes, female characterizations, cultural ideas, and political messages inherent in her body of literature results in an elaborate weaving of historical narratives spanning decades. The narratives mainly reflect the author's ideas about how African women negotiate survival and success in communities that are either rooted in tradition, or in societies that have absorbed Westernization through colonialism.

The thesis would attempt to study the representation of the Nigerian woman's identity as black and female in order to explain how race and gender were woven together as determinant factors that affected the female experience. Lastly, the study comes up with conclusions about images of women in Emecheta's works. One can conclude that Emecheta is sensitive to the position of the African woman. Also that given her background and the fact that her socio-cultural orientation informs her creativity, then her perception of the issues revolving around the plight and position of the African woman is different from a male author's.

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(Supervisor)

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अध्यक्ष
(हिं.आर.सी.)
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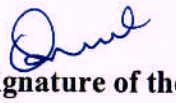
Signature of Supervisor



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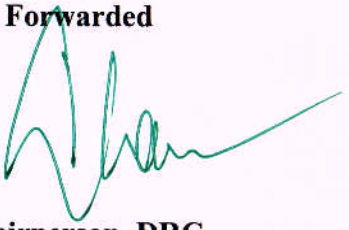

Chairperson, DRC